

How to share a witness to Children in VBS

It is important to understand the cognitive development age levels of children and work within them

(i) **sensory-motor**, (birth to 2 years)

The child starts with behaviors such as the sucking reflex starting at birth.

Behaviors and perceptual-motor activities become integrated: bringing thumb to mouth goes from a spastic to a smoothly coordinated response. Eye-hand coordination develops such as reaching for and grabbing a rattle, or kicking an object to make a sound, etc.

Accommodation is clear with the imitation of sounds or imitation of motions of others, e.g. opening and closing mouth.

Symbolic play demonstrates simple assimilation, by the child using objects of one kind to play the role of another. The child may fold a cloth to have it play the role of a pillow.

The child gradually learns what objects are, what some of their properties are and how to discriminate them from one another.

(ii) **preoperational thought**, (2 to 7 years). When the child seems like a little adult she has many conceptual limitations.

Irreversibility: Cannot imagine the reverse of an action or a relationship.

Egocentrism: cannot take another's perspective. Do not engage in real conversation.

Egocentric speech is non-communicative and often does not require an interlocutor to be present. For Piaget Egocentric speech is play, "simply the joy of repeating for its own sake".

Words and actions are not fully differentiated. communicative speech develops out of egocentric speech.

Centering: Can only consider one aspect of an object or a problem at a time.

Transductive reasoning: Confuses goals or effects with causes.

Syncretic reasoning: From an adult's perspective the child cannot put together different aspects of a problem in a meaningful coherent order

(iii) **concrete operations**, (7 to 11 years). Learn to do the things that the preoperational thinker cannot. Can use memory in a constructive way, for example being able to conceive of the results of actions before they have been executed.

Can take the perspective of others, even if it differs from their own

Can consider the effects of multiple dimensions to solve problems.

Can reason rationally about particulars.

(iv) **formal operations**; (11 years and older). Can abstract out from the concrete situations.

Can put things into a symbolic form and reason about the form independent of the content.

Can see the similarity across different domains

John Westerhoff III, James Fowler, Mary Wilcox and others have done outstanding work in the field of faith development. According to Westerhoff: Faith grows like the rings of a tree, with each ring adding to and changing the tree somewhat, yet building on that which has grown before. Therefore Westerhoff offers a tree analogy and proposes four rings which are involved in the growth process:

EXPERIENCED FAITH (pre-school & early childhood)—“This is what ‘we’ do. This is how ‘we’ act.” It is a time of imitation...a child prays the Lord’s Prayer without understanding the meaning of all the words.

AFFILIATIVE FAITH (childhood & early adolescent years)—“This is what ‘we’ believe and do. This is ‘our’ group/church. It is a time of belonging to a group...still a time which centers around the imitation of what the group does.

SEARCHING FAITH (late adolescence)—“Is this what ‘I’ believe?” This is a time of asking questions...not blindly accepting what others have said. This stage of faith is adding the ‘head’ to the ‘heart’ of the earlier states.

OWNED FAITH (early adulthood)—“This is what ‘I’ believe.” This stage only comes through the searching stage. This is the strong, personal faith that one witnesses to and one is willing to die for.

Practical applications in VBS

1. First and foremost cause each child to experience being loved
2. Listen and watch for cues
 - a. Hear each child's questions through an evangelistic ear
 - b. Apply gospel truths every chance you get
3. Don't plan a "Big Moment"
 - a. Let your sharing come on a natural moment
 - b. Incorporate "gospel moments" all through your lesson and when you do, emphasize it to the place of "think about this"
 - c. You will worry about the "big moment" and it will be anti-climatic for you and the children.
4. Tell your experience
 - a. Tell your story to the children
 - b. Let them hear your prayers and praises
5. Let the children tell their experience
 - a. Give them a time to talk about how they are interacting with God (Keep it age level)
 - i. Ask them "What do you talk to God about?"
 - ii. Ask, "What do you wish God knew about you?"
 - iii. Ask, "What would you like to know about God?"
6. Be sensitive to the Spirit's lead
 - a. Watch for children who seem to be especially moved by the stories etc. and talk to them privately
 - b. In the times you are doing crafts, games food etc, use the time to talk one on one with the children and ask them if they have any questions they would like to talk to you about
 - c. Follow through with the parents when you feel it is appropriate. Give the parent the first chance if you can.